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Sweden's PM Magdalena Andersson

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AFTER FINLAND, NOW SWEDEN CONFIRMS BID TO JOIN NATO

Citing threats from Russia, Sweden said on Monday it will seek to join NATO, reversing two centuries of military non-alignment

BEST THING FOR OUR SECURITY: SWEDISH PM

Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson said NATO membership is "the best thing for Sweden's security", a day after neighbouring Finland confirmed its plan to seek a berth in the alliance. The historic shift in Stockholm's security policy comes amid Russia's war in Ukraine, which has led to a rise in public support in Sweden for joining NATO

PUTIN WARNS OF CONSEQUENCES

- President Vladimir Putin warned that the expansion of NATO military assets to these countries will provoke a Russian response
- It may take about one year for the alliance's 30 members to ratify Sweden's application. NATO has assured Sweden of support in case it faces Russian aggression in the meantime | P9

51%
PEOPLE IN SWEDEN SUPPORT NATO MEMBERSHIP, AS PER A POLL

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Shivalinga? Gyanvapi area sealed

Supreme Court to hear plea today challenging a Varanasi court-mandated survey of the mosque

NAMITA BAJPAI @ Lucknow

THE controversial court-mandated videography of the Gyanvapi mosque complex on Monday took a dramatic turn with a Varanasi court ordering the sealing of a pond after claims of having spotted a 'Shivalinga' in it, though the other side said it was just a defunct fountain. The pond is used by Muslim devotees for *wuzu* or purification rituals before offering *namaz*.

The ongoing drama will shift to the Supreme Court on Tuesday where a bench of justices D Y Chandrachud and P S Narasimha will hear a plea filed by the Anjuman Intezamia Masjid that manages the affairs of the Gyanvapi mosque, challenging the court-mandated survey.

The Varanasi court's order came even as the videography was on, as one lawyer Harishankar Jain, representing a plaintiff, left the survey team midway and filed a court application about the 'Shivalinga'. "As it is a very important piece of evidence, the area should be sealed immediately for its safety," he said in his application. Jain also sought a ban on the entry of Muslims in that area besides allowing not more than 20 people to offer namaz at any given time.

Judge Ravi Kumar Diwakar, while directing the district administration to seal the area of the *wuzu* pond, ordered restricted entry of people into that part of the mosque premises, but did not put a figure to it. The judge, however, made the state chief secretary and director general of police responsible for the supervision of the sealing process and the work done by the district magistrate, commissioner of police and the CRPF for the execution of the order.

The Muslim side was shocked that the court ordered the sealing without hearing it. "The other side is misguiding the nation by calling a defunct fountain a Shivalinga," said Raees Ahmad Ansari, the lawyer of Anjuman Intenzamia Masjid.

Abhay Nath Yadav, representing the Muslim side, said everyone should wait for the submission of the survey report and subsequent court verdict without jumping to conclusions.

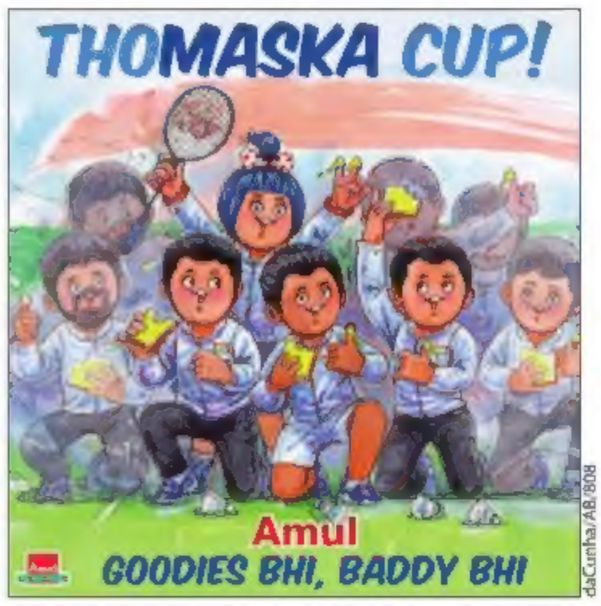
District Magistrate Kushal Raj Sharma said after receiving the order, the *wuzu* pond area was isolated and sealed, adding alternative arrangements for *wuzu* were being made to ensure that Muslims did not face any problem in offering *namaz*.

Other lawyers accompanying the court commission during the survey termed it a 'historic day' saying the evidence they collected would play a key role in all cases related to Gyanvapi in different courts.

Policemen stand guard during the third and last day of the controversial videographic survey at the Gyanvapi mosque complex, in Varanasi on Monday | PTI

Report to be out today

Varanasi District Magistrate Kushal Raj Sharma and court-appointed Advocate General Ajay Kumar Mishra neither confirmed nor denied the presence of the Shivalinga, saying it might be someone's personal claim. Having concluded the three-day survey on Monday, they said the report will be submitted to the court on Tuesday



Pricey fuel set to make flights costly

ARSHAD KHAN @ New Delhi

AIRFARES are likely to soar further as the government has hiked jet fuel prices by 5.29%, its 10th hike in the year so far. Fares have already shot up by 25-40% this year. The latest jump would only make flying costlier.

Jet fuel rates account for about 40% of an airline's running cost. Fares in many sectors have nearly doubled in the last two years or so.

A quick search on any travel portal shows that a one-way flight in the busy Delhi-Mumbai sector is priced between ₹6,550-7,850 (May 23, non-stop, economy) while in the Delhi-Bengaluru sector it is ₹8,400-9,850. In the early 2020s, before Covid struck, a one-way Delhi-Mumbai economy class flight booked a week in advance was priced roughly at ₹3,500. For the Delhi-Bengaluru sector at that point in time, it was about ₹5,000.

Multiple ticketing agents this newspaper spoke to said airfares in 2022 alone have shot up by up to 40% for tickets booked for flights that would take-off in 15 days, while it went up by up to 25-30% if booked after 15 days.

Rajiv Mehra, president, Indian Association of Tour Operators, told this newspaper, "5-10% hike is absorbable but when the fares go up by 30-40%, it dents the tourism sector. After the pandemic we were now hoping for good tourists' arrival but these high fares have poured water on all our hopes."

The price of jet fuel, also called aviation turbine fuel, was increased by ₹6,188.25 per kilolitre, or 5.29%, to ₹1,23,039.71 per kl (₹123 per litre) in Delhi. The fuel cost has been raised by a cumulative 61.7% from January to May 16 this year.

Pant out, Pratap Reddy new Bengaluru top cop

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

SENIOR IPS officer **CH Pratap Reddy**, who was the Additional Director General of Police (ADGP), Law & Order, has been appointed as the Police Commissioner of Bengaluru. DGP Kamal Pant, who had a long stint in the most coveted post, has been transferred and posted as DGP (Recruitment).

An IPS officer of the 1991 batch, Pratap Reddy, who hails from Guntur in Andhra Pradesh, started his career as assistant SP at Arasikere in Hassan and has served as SP of Bijapur (now Vijayapura) and Gulbarga (now Kalaburagi) districts. A BTech graduate, Reddy is one of the few officers with a deep understanding and experience of technology. He has served as the Director of the National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM) too.

Besides, Reddy has served as IGP of the western range, police commissioner of Mysuru and additional commissioner of police in Bengaluru.

Last year, he was handpicked by Home Minister Araga Jnanendra to lead the investigation into the gangrape of a student in Mysuru.

Pant, who had one of the longest stints of one year and 10 months in the top post, handled several high-profile cases during his tenure, including the Bitcoin scam, Sandalwood drug case, and also DJ Halli riots. P2

PM USES BUDDHISM THREAD TO STRENGTHEN NEPAL TIES

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

CONNECTED by the noble thread of Buddhism, India and Nepal are deepening ties in many spheres, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said during a day-long visit to Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha on the occasion of Buddha Purnima.

"Today's meeting with PM @SherBDeuba was excellent. We discussed the full range of relations between India and Nepal," Modi tweeted. He also laid the foundation stone for the India International Centre for Buddhist Culture and Heritage besides visiting the famous Mayadevi temple along with his Nepal counterpart Sher Bahadur Deuba. Both sides signed six pacts.

Modi's visit has cheered up Tibetans, many of whom hope it will help reduce China's influence in Nepal. "China uses Buddhism for political reasons. We are glad that India and Nepal ties are strengthening again. Nepalese leaders need to be mindful of Chinese political manoeuvres," said Tenzin Lekshay spokesperson for the Central Tibetan Administration.

For long China has sought to develop Lumbini and recently offered $3 billion to make it a World Peace City through the Asia Pacific Exchange and Cooperation Foundation. But China's interest in Nepal through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is making people wary.

"I have always told my friends in Nepal that you are second in line after Tibet to be occupied by China. Nepal seems to have understood China's objective and has pushed back in India's favour," Lekshay said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses a gathering on the 2,566th Buddha Jayanti and Lumbini Day 2022 in Lumbini | PTI

Sister city pact

India and Nepal agreed in principle to establish sister city relations between Lumbini and Kushinagar, that are among the holiest sites of Buddhism, a statement by the Ministry of External Affairs said

EXPRESS READ

Ready to give books and bicycles, says CM

Tumakuru: Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Monday announced that the scheme of distributing free bicycles to high school students, which was stopped for a couple of years, will be resumed from the current academic year. "It was stopped due to the Covid-19 pandemic, when schools were closed. Now, we will distribute bicycles with the funds allocated in the supplementary budget," he declared | P2

Indigo 'mishandled' passenger: DGCA

New Delhi: Indigo staff acted inappropriately in not allowing a specially-abled child from boarding a flight at the Ranchi airport last month, a preliminary probe by the DGCA has found. The civil aviation regulator has asked the airline to submit a show-cause notice and said action will be taken after hearing the submissions | P7

Delay in textbook supply tied to power crisis, Russia-Ukraine war

Children exercise at the Higher Primary School in Devarachikkanahalli near Bannerghatta Road in Bengaluru as schools reopen after two years on Monday | ASHISHKRISHNA HP

DONNA EVA @ Bengaluru

WITH the new academic year beginning from Monday and printers suspending printing, there is a concern over the timely supply of textbooks to schoolchildren. Though such delays recur every year, the crisis this year may be attributed to coal and power shortage triggered by the Russian-Ukraine war.

Education Department officials and members of the Karnataka Textbook Society (KTBS) said textbooks could be ready only by June. "We have told printers that this is of utmost priority. The main reason for the delay is the war crisis," said MP Madegowda, director of KTBS.

The India Paper Manufacturers' Association (IPMA) too blamed it on the power crisis triggered by the war. Deepak Mittal, president of the Federation of Paper Traders' Associations of India (FPTA), said there are a number of issues. "The price of coal has definitely increased production costs by 25-30 per cent. There is also an overall dip in production. However, with the start of offline classes this academic year, the demand has increased, especially for printing of textbooks," he added.

"As of now, buffer stocks for coal are getting low. If the crisis continues and there is any disruption in coal supplies and resulting power cuts, it will definitely cause problems," he added.

Printers have already alerted the government that they are facing a shortage of raw materials. But Primary and Secondary Education Minister BC Nagesh recently warned printers that they would be penalised if textbooks are not supplied on time.

Hedgewar speech will remain in textbook: Nagesh

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Tumakuru

On the day the new academic year started in the state on Monday, Primary and Secondary Education Minister BC Nagesh defended the inclusion of a speech by RSS founder Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in the Kannada language textbook for Class X.

"Our focus is on promoting the RSS ideology from which students can derive inspiration on patriotism and nationalism. Those who have been criticising our move should go through the content first and then come for a debate," he said on the sidelines, even as Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai welcomed students on the first day of the academic year at Empress Karnataka Public School in Tumakuru.

"Some people oppose it as they wish to insert their own ideology into textbooks. There is no question of removing Hedgewar's speech from the textbook. The book has already gone for print," he added.

"Changes in textbook content is an evolving process. Experts do suggest changes from time to time which have to be incorporated. As per Christian history, the Earth was flat. Should we continue that," he asked, justifying the inclusion of Hedgewar's speech by the Textbook Revision Committee. P6

Our focus is on promoting the RSS ideology from which students can derive inspiration on patriotism and nationalism. Those who have been criticising our move should go through the content first and then come for a debate

BC Nagesh, Education Minister

Bajrang Dal trains youth in firearms, plaint filed

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Madikeri

A POLICE complaint was filed on Monday against Bajrang Dal for organising a firearms training camp for youth at Ponnampet in Kodagu recently. Pictures of youth practising with rifles have gone viral on social media with netizens criticising the Hindutva outfit.

The controversial camp -- 'Shaurya Prashikshana Varga' -- was organised at Sai Shankar School at Ponnampet from May 5 to 11. Hundreds of Bajrang Dal activists were reportedly trained in using firearms. BJP legislators from the district were present at the inauguration of the event.

At the concluding ceremony, each participant was presented a 'trishul' (trident) as part of the the organisation's 'Trishul Deeksha'.

The complaint was filed by the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI) with the Ponnampet police. Later, Basheer, SDPI district secretary, told the media that the arms training for youngsters is condemnable. "In the name of 'Shaurya Prashikshana Varga', the organisation is instigating terror activities. The district administration must initiate strict action against organisation leaders and all those who took part in the event," he demanded. P4

Youth undergo firearms training in Ponnampet, Kodagu district | EXPRESS

CM, officials to use Kannada email IDs

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @ Bengaluru

SOON, URLs (Uniform Resource Locators) of websites attached to several state government departments will be in Kannada along with the existing English links. This is part of the e-Kannada portal project, developed by the Kannada Development Authority (KDA), and will be launched by CM Basavaraj Bommai on Tuesday. With this, official email IDs of the CM, ministers and other officials will have Kannada letters.

The eKannada portal has been developed by KDA in association with the e-governance department and linguistic experts. KDA Chairman TS Nagabharana told TNIE the eKannada portal will have various services, including a Padakanaja (Kannada dictionary). In all, 86 Kannada dictionaries, including the one developed by Agriculture University, music and dance experts and others will be uploaded. At present, over 6 lakh words have been uploaded, while they are planning to add 90 lakh words in a phased manner. The mobile app version of the portal too is available. One can translate from Kannada to English, English to Kannada, speech to text and text to speech, source different fonts and get other services.

Nagabharana said many official letters, notifications and even government orders are issued in English and even Kannada letters contain technical words in English. P4